

Talking Points
Gallo Show
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Difficult to imagine a starker contrast in coverage of Katrina recovery as stories on the second anniversary in The Sun-Herald on the Coast and the Clarion-Ledger in Jackson.

Just a stunning difference.

One newspaper whose management, staff and readers are living through recovery every day and another newspaper in Jackson that sends so-called reporters down to the Coast and focuses only on the things that are wrong.

Make no mistake, much work remains to be done. But, importantly, much progress has been made and more progress is made every day.

Both newspapers did a number of stories and editorials during the second anniversary week.

The Sun-Herald asked and answered legitimate questions on where the public money is going, where charitable contributions are going.

The Coast newspaper published extensive lists of grant programs, many of which were largely invented here in Mississippi, and presented to and approved by Congress and the Administration as an unprecedented response to an unprecedented disaster.

The Sun-Herald had helpful information that served to give readers a sense of how the recovery is coming along.

The Sun-Herald was just factual. They used words in headlines and stories like:

“Grants never flowed like this” balanced with “Still, some say money too slow”

“A Renaissance”

“Katrina gave South Mississippi an unusual chance to improve our quality of life”

“Help on the way”

“Getting on track”

“Signs of hope for heritage,” and “Future looks brighter for Biloxi Lighthouse, Grass Lawn, Old Spanish Fort, Beauvoir” talking about restoring historic buildings

“Most repairs are finished” and “In session” talking about schools being back in operation.

“Making it work,” talking about museums and restoring the arts.

“Even better than before,” in a story about environmental restoration

In short, the Sun-Herald reported the news in a very fair and factual way, not all praise, not all criticism, which is what most reasonable people would expect two years after the worst natural disaster in American history.

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It was a different story in Jackson.

The Clarion-Ledger gave voice to a very small fraction of Coast advocacy groups who found something to complain about.

The Clarion-Ledger consistently used words like “struggle” “shortages,” “shortfalls,” “complaints,” “gripes”

For a couple of days, I thought they’d lost their thesaurus.

But then the next day came and we read headlines like:

“Recovery funds missing lower income residents”

“Strom related school problems linger”

“Coast not yet whole”

“Immigrants feel fallout on Coast”

Then, they went back to:

“Coast colleges continue to struggle”

“Medical facilities cope with staff shortages”

“Critics: Billions meant to help storm victims not well spent”

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It was like the difference between night and day.

Mississippi has had – since the early days after Katrina – a real, comprehensive plan for recovery.

I don't expect everybody to like all of it; there are some parts I think should have gone faster and more efficiently.

We're two years into a recovery that I expect to take at least a decade under the best of conditions.

Some people argue the Coast didn't really recover from Hurricane Camille in 1969 until gaming was legalized and casinos began to open in 1992. That's 23 years.

We'll do better than that.

The Coast will change; it's already changed.

Some people will say the changes aren't all good, and that's fine for them to say.

I say South Mississippi has an unprecedented opportunity to build back bigger and better. And the vast majority of the progress made to date is going in the right direction.